

DOWNSTREAM

Number 1 Spring 1999

Provided by
MDC Division of Watershed Management
to enhance public awareness within the watershed region

They ain't makin' it any more.

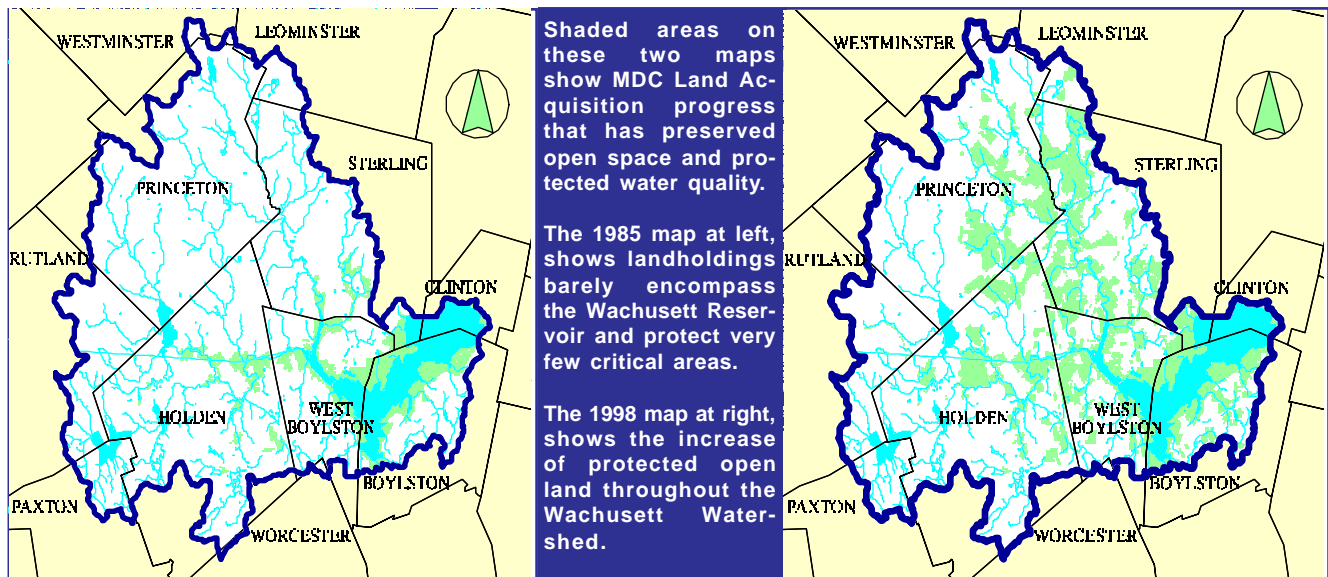
Land is a dear commodity, as precious as pure water to our well being. The demands being placed on our state's 6,000,000 acres by the collective requirements of food, fiber, clean air and water, housing and commerce are ever increasing. There are six million baystaters - about one to the acre. That was the entire population of all thirteen colonies combined in 1776, when every family could expect to own 100 acres or more.

The race for space, especially in our more urbanized areas, between development and natural area interests has never been more intense. Large acreages under private ownership are dwindling. The average land ownership tract in central and eastern Massachusetts is approaching little more than a houseslot. Publicly owned lands, conversely, are generally not sold or disposed of for non-open space uses. The public increasingly relies on state lands for open space amenities, including freedom from fear of eventual development.

2.4 million consumers in 52 Massachusetts cities and towns. It is an important component of the long term MDC watershed management and protection program on the 400 square miles that make up the Quabbin, Ware River, and Wachusett watershed.

In the last ten years, the MDC has purchased 2,400 acres at Quabbin, 3,500 acres at Ware River, and over 10,000 acres on the Wachusett Watershed. This acquired land has met certain criteria, the most prevalent being close proximity to rivers and streams which flow into these reservoirs. While most acreage is purchased outright, some conservation restrictions (CR's) are purchased. Selling a CR means surrendering the right to develop or farm, but retaining ownership for forestry, privacy, and access control.


The MDC Land Acquisition program is funded through year 2008 with monies derived from Mass Water Resource Authority water user fees. Tax



The primary open space amenity which drives the MDC is pure water. The cleanest waters in the world flow through and over natural, mostly forested watersheds. Forest canopies and soils are unsurpassed filters of all manner of pollutants and pathogens.

The protection of key areas of our natural landscape helps, via the acquisition of land and development rights, to insure a high quality water supply for

dollars are not used to acquire MDC watershed lands.

Municipalities receive Payments-in-Lieu-of Taxes (PILOTS) on all MDC lands within the town. In many cases, PILOT payments equal or exceed taxes paid by prior owners. 

Jim French is the MDC Land Acquisition Coordinator. For more information, call him at (508) 835-4816 ext. 214

Thoughts on Private Forest Stewardship

We often need to scratch our heads and think hard when hearing that an oil change, or lawn fertilizer, or house construction site on the ridge five miles from the well or reservoir has anything to do with drinking water quality. The manner in which rain falls and flows and travels through soils and streams and wetlands is mysterious to most who give it any thought.

Hitchhikers

The "out-of-sight-out-of-mind" phenomenon is breaking down, however. Modern scientific measurements of water quality and movement give us a picture window of insight and information where only a few years ago we had little more than a peep hole. The mystery of the rain drop's trials and travels on the way to our taps is becoming quite clear. We have discovered that the adventurous drop is most generous in picking up hitchhikers. Just about every brand of pollutant from oil to lawn chemicals to septic bacteria has their thumb out, whether starting from the ridgetop or the streambank.

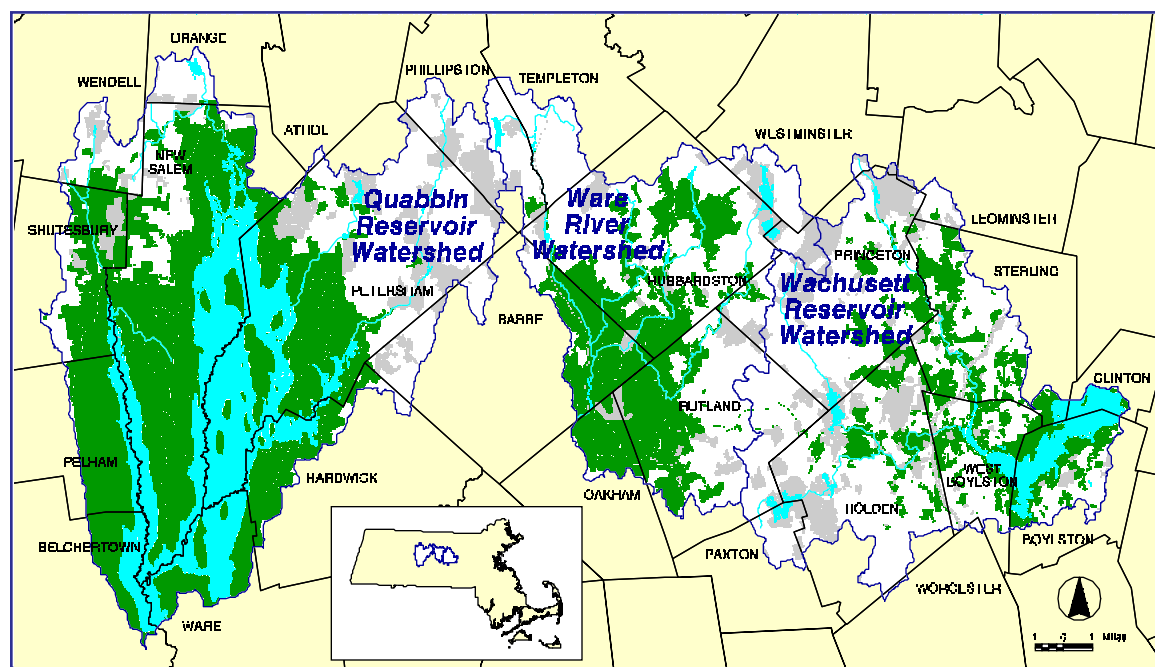
Puzzles

The Great Divide, runs along the Rocky Mountains backbone, deciding which portion of America drains into the Atlantic or the Pacific Oceans - the two mothers of all watersheds on our continent. Like a thousand piece puzzle each stream and river has its own watershed which fits into others - contributing their yield to downstream destinations, each to the next until the sea is reached.

The MDC and the Mass Water Resources Authority (MWRA) are partners in supplying clean water to residents in 52 cities and towns. Millions of gallons are delivered every day through a complex labyrinth of reservoirs and aqueducts. The Quabbin Reservoir, Ware River, and Wachusett Reservoir Watersheds are the three pieces of our region's puzzle from which this precious resource is collected and protected. (A fourth, the Sudbury Reservoir Watershed is maintained on an emergency supply basis only. It's surrounding landscape has become too urbanized to be a safe source.) Approximately 45,000 people live within these three active watersheds. The Wachusett is the most densely populated with about 33,000 residents. It is also the least protected with MDC ownership just reaching 25%, compared to 65% of the pristine Quabbin Watershed - the state's largest collection of wild acres and open water.

Fate

You are receiving this newsletter as a landowner within this community of watershed residents. Water flowing through and over private lands within these watersheds is vitally important to both local residents on private and municipal wells, and MWRA consumers. While the MDC maintains care and control of about 93,000 acres of protected open space, private landowners with tracts of several acres or more



The 3 MDC Watersheds are shown at left. Green areas depict MDC owned protected lands. Grey areas depict privately owned watershed protection lands.

Thoughts on Private Forest Stewardship - cont'd

control over 75,000 acres within the same area. The use and fate of private lands can have a great impact on the long range quality of our natural resources, whether it's water, wildlife habitat, biological diversity, or forest products.

Put another way, some 30% of this vital water supply system, for which nearly half of the baystate population depends, is in the hands of private woodland owners like yourself - whose property lies within an area comprising less than 5% of the Massachusetts land base.

The MDC and MWRA are doing what they can to insure a pure water supply with state of the art management strategies on land in public ownership. An aggressive land acquisition program has added more than 16,000 carefully selected acres to the three watershed reservations since 1986. Ten year plans for each watershed, written with public participation, provide direction in how we manage forest and wildlife resources, public use of MDC lands, the abatement of pollution sources including septic disposal, agricultural waste, stormwater runoff, and hazards associated with transportation spills, construction sites, and (more important than you might imagine) gulls and geese.

The private woodland owner is an indispensable partner in this effort. Recognizing this, the MDC has provided woodland owners with assistance in covering the costs of preparing forest management



HAPPY TRAILS

At both the Quabbin and Wachusett watersheds, there is a forest stewardship trail open for the public to enjoy. Both are about 3/4 of a mile in length and take about

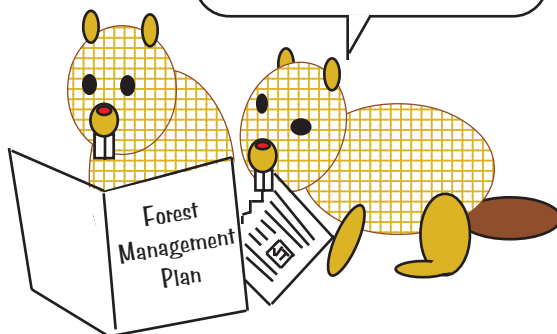
an hour. A brochure is available at the trailhead kiosk which describes, using numbered posts along the trail, various aspects of forestry, wildlife, land use history, and forest disturbance. The Stewardship Demonstration Forest Trail at Quabbin is located behind the Visitor Center in Belchertown. At Wachusett, the Trail is located at Stillwater Farm in Sterling (at the intersection of Routes 140 and 62). Both have been made possible with grants from the Mass Forest Stewardship Program administered by the Dept of Environmental Management. They are free and open to the public.

plans and land management practices under Chapter 61 Forestland classification, and through the Mass Forest Stewardship Program administered by the Department of Environmental Management. The MDC also purchases conservation restrictions from woodland owners, as well as outright acquisitions of acreages which meet certain criteria. Land conservation options for woodland owners provide great opportunities for both your wallet and your wilds. 💧

And Another Thing...

Hey, this is good reading!

Yeah, real food for thought!



Downstream is produced twice annually by the Metropolitan District Commission of The Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Our goal is to inform the public about Watershed Protection activities, provide a conduit for public input, and promote environmentally responsible land management practices.

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This newsletter is published twice a year and includes articles of interest to landowners and residents of the MDC watershed system communities. You are encouraged to send in questions or comments which we will try to answer in subsequent newsletters. Let us know what you think.



Enfield Lookout - Quabbin Reservoir

You are encouraged to contact us if you wish to learn more about programs and assistance available to help landowners. We value the contribution your well cared for land provides and welcome the opportunity to work with you. Please contact us at:

DOWNSTREAM
180 Beaman Street
West Boylston, MA 01583

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INSIDE;

They Ain't Makin' it Anymore	1
<i>About the MDC Land Acquisition Program</i>	
Private Forest Stewardship	2
<i>Thoughts on Responsible Land Management</i>	
Happy Trails...	3
<i>Free Forest Demonstration Trail Tours</i>	
For Your Information...	4

TO:



Quabbin Reservoir, Aerial View